

Assessing India's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan

Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US withdrawal*

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Afghanistan has seen it all - fluctuating from a monarchy to communism and then a theocratic state before lurching towards democracy, all in less than 50 years. It is a nation of many contradictions – peopled by a Pashtun majority who lay claim to a larger legacy across its eastern borders, a large Tajik minority more numerous than the country from which they originally migrated, a Hazara Shia minority living in harmony with the majority for the most part, and an Uzbek minority that makes up nearly 10 percent of the population. Despite these contradictions, it has stuck together as a nation, often bloodied but proudly unbowed.

Throughout this tumultuous phase in Afghanistan's history, several nation-states became involved in Afghanistan, assuming different political roles themselves. India, whose historical and cultural links with Afghanistan can be traced as far back as the Indus Valley Civilisation¹ (3300–1900 BCE), was no exception. In fact, India carved a niche as a partner that engaged in building state capacity in Afghanistan. Today, India is Afghanistan's largest export destination, accounting for nearly 46 percent of its total exports.² Despite its own economic challenges, India is also the fifth largest donor of development aid to Afghanistan and the largest regional donor.³ Given these development credentials in Afghanistan, a report to the US Congress by the Department of Defense had to concede, after decades of policy misalignment with the Indian position: 'India is Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest contributor of development assistance in the region.'⁴

1 Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. "The Indus valley tradition of Pakistan and western India." *Journal of World Prehistory* 5, no. 4 (1991): 331–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00978474>

2 Afghanistan Economic Profile, *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/afg/>

3 Mullen, Rani. 2017. "India in Afghanistan: Understanding Development Assistance by Emerging Donors to Conflict-Affected Countries", *Stimson Center Policy Brief*

4 Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, Report to Congress In Accordance With Section 1225 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, December 2017